

Dear Sir or Madam:

It is already disturbing, the emaciation of media as a result of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. I would hope that the FCC will not increase even further the number of media outlets that can be owned by a single company in a given market and in fact take steps to reverse the extreme consolidation that resulted from the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

The selling off of smaller, more local, media venues to the few big players has resulted in a media which is almost solely focused on the bottom line. There is competition for sure, fierce competition, but it is only amongst the few big players who have made their way to the table to cut up the media pie. It is the FCC that has laid the ground rules for who is going to get to that table. It is the FCC that has designed a filter, which eliminates all but the major players in corporate media.

And look at the media that has resulted. It is homogeneous and appeals mostly to the lowest common denominator of our emotional, intellectual and psychological make up. The result - the dumbing down of the audience - could perhaps be tolerated, if it were not ultimately to work for the undermining of our republic. I think any objective analysis of political institutions around the world will easily confirm the idea put forth by Thomas Jefferson that the health of a democracy is completely dependent upon an informed public.

Take alone the issue of this current review by the FCC. On what media outlets, with what frequency are we seeing and hearing about this "public debate" on revising the regulations?

And please do not resort to the excuse that the media is only giving to the public what the public wants. The issue is not "hot" because the existing media power structure has decided not to make it "hot". It could be made as hot as the disappearance of Chandra Levy, if they so chose. Like all appetites it might take a little teasing to get the palate of the public attuned to such issues, but it can be done and upon it depends the health of our democracy.

Please try to design a process which puts at the media table a much larger group of entities with more representatives from the public sector and from civil society, entities that are interested in presenting to the public a more diverse, refined product and developing the taste of the public for that product. The hearts and minds of the citizenry of the future are in your hands; it is a very powerful role you play, please reflect deeply on its ultimate consequences and act accordingly.

Sincerely,

Dr. James W. Merewether

